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ABSTRACT

Because the factors which influence parent functioning have not been extensively researched, a study was conducted to determine the relationships among marital adjustment, child temperament, locus of control, and parent satisfaction. Participants included 93 volunteer couples who had at least one child at home. Parents averaged 35 years old and had been married at least 13 years. Questionnaires were sent to participants which measured marital adjustment by the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, personal control by Rotter's locus of control scale, personality traits by Edwards Personal Preference Schedule, and child temperament and parent satisfaction by instruments designed for this study. The results indicated that parent satisfaction increased as marital adjustment increased. Parents who perceived their child's temperament as more pleasant had higher levels of parent satisfaction. Personal control variables had only slight relationships to parent satisfaction. Personality variables had no relationship, although more nurturant parents seemed to be more satisfied. It is concluded that parent functioning is a multiply determined phenomenon and that further research with other variables such as the environment is needed. Five pages of references conclude the document. (ABL)

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PREDICTING PARENT SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT

The present research was a test of a recent theory concerning parent functioning which stated that parent functioning is influenced by the health of the marital relationship, the child's characteristics such as temperament, and the parent's personality. One hundred eight-six parents comnpleted a self-report questionnaire consisting of several measures related to the three previously mentioned contexts. Parent satisfaction was used as the independent variable representing one aspect of parent functioning. Marital adjustment, child temperament, and the parent's feelings of personal control were significantly correlated with parent satisfaction. Parents who were low in any of the contexts had significantly lower parent satisfaction scores, lending support to the the theory that parent functioning is a multiply determined phenomenon.

PREDICTING PARENT SATISFACTION

The determinants of individual differences in parenting, those aspects of life which shape and influence parent functioning, have long been neglected as topics of socialization. Tremendous effort has been expended studying the characteristics and consequences of parenting, but much less attention has been devoted to studying what influences parents to parent the way they do.

Belsky (1984) has presented one of the first conceptual models of the determinants of parent functioning. Belsky's model presumed that parent functioning is directly influenced by the broader social context in which the parent-child relationship operates (marital relations, work, etc.), by forces within the child (characteristics of individuality such as temperament), and by forces within the individual parent (personality). He also believed that the parenting system is buffered against threats to its integrity by strength in each of three contexual resources. When one or more of these determinants are at risk, Belsky proposed that parent functioning would be adversely affected. He further claimed that parenting would be most protected when the psychological resources of the parents are strong and least threatened in the face of difficult child characteristics, such as temperament. Belsky stated

that no investigation to date had empirically tested all three contextual determinants of parenting. This study was a partial test of the Belsky model.

In order to test the theoretical propostions it was necessary to operationally define the variables which could represent each of the three contexts as well as the main dependent variable of parenting. Parent satisfaction was selected as the dependent variable because of the previous work on that variable (Chilman, 1983; Meredith, Stinnett, and Cacioppo, 1984) and because parent satisfaction represents one aspect of parent functioning. Parent satisfaction was defined as one's sense of well-being or degree of happiness with the parenting role. Parent satisfaction could vary from low satisfaction, where parents find more negative aspects than positive aspects in parenting, to high satisfaction where parents feel they have been good parents and find many gratifications in parenting (Abbott, Meredith, Cacioppo, Gard, & Wikoff, 1985).

The independent variables chosen to represent Belsky's three contexts of determinants of parenting were child temperament, marital adjustment, and parent personality characteristics (see Figure 1). The variables were selected because of their relationship to Belsky's model and because of previous support for their relationship to parental

functioning. Child temperament has received much attention for its role in influencing parenting. While the findings are somewhat mixed, some evidence supports the idea that a difficult temperament on the part of the child can negatively influence parental functioning (Bates, 1980; Campbell, 1979; Kelly, 1976; and Milliones, 1978).

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place Figure 1 about here

The interaction between marital adjustment and parenting behavior has also been researched (Belsky, Learner, and Spanier, 1984; Belsky, 1984; Crnic, Greenburg, & Ragozin, 1983). These studies have generally shown that the positiveness of the interaction between husband and wife was related to better parenting.

Evidence also suggests that specific personality characteristics of the parent are related to parental functioning. Mondell and Tyler (1981) have studied the parent's internal locus of control and found it positively related to positive parent functioning.

Other studies have indicated that nuturance (Ainsworth, 1973; Baumrind, 1975; Belsky, Goode, and Most, 1980), affliation (Schilling, Gilchrist, and Schinke,1984), and aggression (Rollins & Thomas, 1979) are associated with

positive parent functioning.

Based on the above discussion, the specific hypotheses for this study include:

1. There is a significant positive relationship between marital adjustment and parent satisfaction.

2. There is a significant positive relationship between child temperament and parent satisfaction.

3. There is a significant positive relationship between locus of control and parent satisfaction.

4. Parents who score above the median on nuturance, affiliation, and dominance and lower on succorance and aggression on an Edwards Personality Profile will have significantly higher parent satisfaction scores than parents who score below the median on parent satisfaction.

5. Parents who score above the median in all three contexts--- marital adjustment, personal control and child temperament---will have significantly higher parent satisfaction scores than parents who score below the median in one or more of the three contextual determinants.

METHOD

Subjects and Proceedure

Ninety-three couples with at least one child living at home were recruited on a volunteer basis from college classes, by mail from a parent newsletter and from the authors' acquaintances. The subjects were each given a 15 page questionnaire which were returned to the authors using a self-addressed, stamped envelope. The mean education level of the parents was 15 years and their mean family income was $28,000. The parents averaged 35 years in age and had been married for an average of 13 years. The median number of children in each family was 2.

Instruments

Dyadic Adjustment Scale. This 32 item instrument measures overall marital adjustment. The possible range of scores was 0 to 151; the higher the scores the better the marital adjustment. An alpha reliability of .96 for the total scale and a correlation of .86 with the Locke-Wallace Marital Satisfaction Scale was also reported by Spanier (1976).

Personal Control. Rotter's (1966) locus of control scale measured the belief that one's personal outcomes are under personal control rather than under the control of external forces such as fate or luck. Each of the 29 items has two statements and respondents select the alternative more characteristic of themselves. Six items are fillers, therefore scores range from 0 to 23, with the highest scores representing a more internal control orientation. Rotter reported that test-retest reliability ranged from .49 to .78. Internal consistency using Kuder-Richardson correlations have been reported from .69 to .79. Rotter also provided evidence of construct and discriminant validity.

Edwards Personal Preference Schedule. This personality inventory consists of 224 forced-choice pairs of statements that profile 15 manifest psychological needs such as affiliation and aggression (Edwards, 1959). For descriptions of these needs see Footnote 1. Because of the ipsative nature of the scale, the individual variables are not independent, but represent the level of a characteristic in relation to other personality characteristics. Test-retest reliabilities from .74 to .88 and split-half reliabilities from .60 to .87 have been reported. Significant correlations have been reported with the Guilford Martin Personality Inventory and the Taylor

Manifest Anxiety Scale (Anastasi, 1982). The questionnaire has been widely used (Eidelson, 1983; Furnham and Henderson, 1982; Lloyd & Lloyd, 1984; Stolle & Bravenec, 1984).

Parental Impressions of Child Temperament. Several standardized scales were examined (Bates, Freeland, and Loundbury, 1979; Carey, 1980; Martin, 1982; Thomas, Chess, Birch, and Korn, 1963) for possible use, but none were designed to evaluate temperament, as perceived by the parents, for the wide range of child ages needed for this study (Hubert, Wachs, Peter-Martin, Gandow, 1982). Using these scales as a model, especially the temperament categories of Thomas et al. (1963), an 11-item measure of child temperament, using a 5-point Likert scaling format of strongly agree to strongly disagree, was developed with a score range of 5 to 55. Higher scores indicated that the parents viewed the child as having a more positive and easy temperament. The scale had an alpha of .81 and item-total correlations ranged from .20 to .68 in this study.

Parent Satisfaction. Previous researchers have attempted to measure parent satisfaction but no scale with established validity or reliability was found. Chilman (1983) used a four-item scale, Mullis and Mullis (1982) designed a 14-item scale, and Campbell (1981) used a

one-item measure. Building on this past research, a 5-item scale using a 9-point Likert-type format was designed. A 9-point format was used because past research indicated that such a format differentiates better than a more typical 5-point method (Headley, 1981). Scores ranged from 9 to 45 with higher scores representing a higher degree of parenting satisfaction. For the current study, the scale had an alpha reliability of .79 with item-total scale correlations ranging from .49 to .69.

RESULTS

The first three hypotheses were investigated through the use of path analysis (SPSSX, 1983). Path coefficients are essentially standardized regression coeffients with the following assumptions applied to them: a weak, unidirectional, causal ordering of variables, all variables measured on an interval scale, and residual variables not correlated with each other or with the model variables (Pedhazur, 1982). Path coefficients indicate if the data and theory are consistent but do not preclude the possibility of a different ordering. The path coefficients from multiple regression analysis are presented in Figure 1. All correlations between the independent variables were less

than .200.

Hypothesis 1 was confirmed. There was a moderately positive relationship between parent satisfaction and marital adjustment (r=.38, p<.001). As predicted by hypothesis 2, child temperament was also moderately related to parent satisfaction (r=.41, p<.001). The third hypothesis stated that locus of control was related to parent satisfaction. Personal control was slightly related to parent satisfaction (r=.24,p<.01).

Hypothesis 4 stated that parents who report high levels of parent satisfaction will have personality profiles higher on nurturance, affiliation, and dominance and lower on succorance and aggression than parents reporting low parent satisfaction. Personality variables included in Hypothesis four measured by the Edwards Personality Preference Schedule and using t-tests showed no significant statistical differences on the individual personality variables between the two groups of parents. However, the satisfied parents had a slightly higher profile on dominance, nurturance, and achievement as predicted. Dissatisfied parents showed a higher profile on succorance, and aggression (see Table 1).

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place Table 1 about here

Hypothesis 5 stated that parents who scored above the median in personal control, marital adjustment, and child temperment would have higher parent satisfaction scores than parents who scored below the median in one or more of the contexts. To test that hypothesis, parent satisfaction scores were compared using planned contrasts for those who were high on all independent variables and those who were low on one or more variables (see Table 2). As predicted by Belsky those parents who scored high in their feeling of personal control, who had a high marital adjustment, and who had a child with an easy temperment reported higher means for parent satisfaction than those who were low on all three contexts (t = 5.176, p<.001), those who were low on two contexts (t = 3.454, p<.001), and those who were low on one of the three contexts (t = 1.479, p=.07).

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place Table 2 about here

DISCUSSION

The results of this research lend support to Belsky's model of determinants of parenting when parent satisfaction is used as the dependent variable and when child temperament, personal control, and marital adjustment are used to represent three contextual determinants. The significant relationship between marital adjustment and parent satisfaction lends support to the influence of Belsky's first context, the broader social context in which the parent-child relationship operates. As marital adjustment increases, parent satisfaction also increases. Therefore, parent functioning appears to be moderately dependent upon the marital relationship within which it occurs.

Evidence for Belsky's second context, the child's contribution to parent functioning, was shown by the relationship between child temperament and parent satisfaction. As the information relates only to parent perceptions of temperament and not necessarily to the child's actual temperament, it can only be concluded at this point that the child's temperament filtered through their parent's perceptions has a moderately strong influence on the parent's satisfaction. Parents who perceived their

child's temperament as being more pleasant and manageable reported higher satisfaction with parenting.

Belsky also predicted that forces within the individual parent would also influence parent functioning. Personal control efficacy was related slightly to parent satisfaction. However, it seems reasonable that satisfied parents would be more likely to believe they controlled the events in their lives as opposed to the dissatisfied parents. The personality variables tested by the Edwards showed no significant differences between the two groups of parents. However, the general trend seems to indicate that satisfied parents tend to be more nurturant and more affiliative than other parents. They had a stronger need for dominance, Edward's term for leadership, and exhibit more achievement needs. Satisfied parents were less aggressive in terms of anger and hostility. They also have less need for succorance---to receive help, encouragement, and affection from others.

The present research lends support to Belsky's contention that parenting is multiply determined and that the three contexts act as a buffering system for parent functioning. As the results showed, parents who were low in one or more of the contexts had sigificantly lower parent satisfaction scores. While not a part of our hypotheses, a

more detailed examination of Table 2 allows the reader to also examine the results in terms of Belsky's prediction that the context of personality is the most critical context for maintaining parent functioning. These research results did not confirm that prediction possibly because of the limited measure of parent personality.

The results of this study need to be interpreted cautiously because of its cross-sectional nature and because of the use of correlational data. The implication of the model is that child temperament, marital adjustment, and personal control cause parent satisfaction. Since all variables were measured at the same time the results need to be interpreted in the same way as any correlation coefficient. While a direction is implied by the model, it is possible that the cause and effect relationship is just the opposite. It is possible, also, that there are other factors not considered here that would better explain the results.

Further research concerning other variables associated with child, environmental, and parent contexts need to be investigated to expand our understanding of the determinants of parenting. Parenting does not exist in a vacuum but is influenced directly by individual characteristics of the child and the parent and the social context within which they live.

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Footnotes

1. Abbreviated definitions of the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule variables are as follows:

Achievement: to be successful, to accomplish something of importance.

Affiliation: To form friendships and participate in friendly groups, to share and do things with friends.

Aggression: to criticize or blame others, to make fun of others, to become angry and to get revenge.

Autonomy: to say what one thinks, to be independent of others, to criticize authority.

Change: to do new and different things, to seek change in routines, to travel.

Deference: to get suggestions from others to praise others, to do what is expected.

Dominance: to be a leader, to argue one's views, to make decisions, to persuade and direct others.

Endurance: to stick to and complete a job, to work hard and keep at a task until finished.

Intraception: to analyze the behavior and motives of self and others, to empathize with others.

Nurturance: to help those in trouble or the less fortunate, to be kind and sympathetic, and affectionate to others.

Order: to be neat and organized, to plan ahead.

Succorance: to seek help, encouragement, kindness, and affection from others.

FIGURE 1

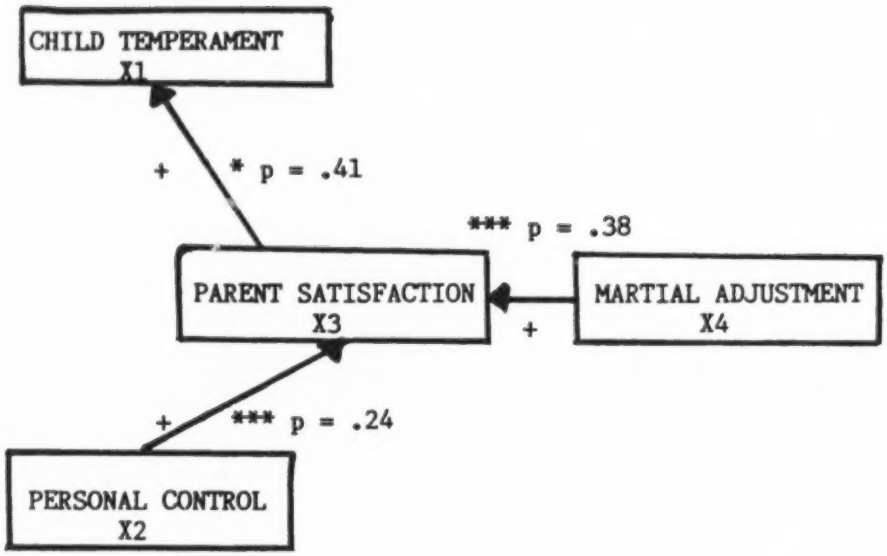

Figure 1: A prediction model of parental satisfaction with path analysis results included.

* When these causes are considered independent of each other, their path coefficients are equal to the zero order correlation with the next endogenous variable. Therefore, r13 = p31 = beta 31, and r23 = p32 - beta 32

** r24 = p42 + p43r23

*** r34 = p43 + p42r23

TABLE 1

Means on the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule for Satisfied and Dissatisfied Parents

	Satisfied Parents (n=65)	Dissatisfied Parents (n=87)
Achievement	16.34	15.84
Affiliation	15.48	14.95
Aggression	10.18	11.23
Autonomy	13.32	13.20
Change	16.23	16.37
Deference	12.46	11.49
Dominance	15.49	14.52
Endurance	13.42	14.37
Intraception	14.85	14.87
Nurturance	15.66	14.82
Order	12.72	12.30
Succorance	11.31	12.85

TABLE 2

Parent Satisfaction Means for Those Scoring Above and Below the Median on Three Determinants of Parenting.

DYADIC ADJUSTMENT	PERSONAL CONTROL	CHILD TEMPERAMENT	SAMPLE SIZE	SUBGROUP MEANS	GROUP MEANS
H	H	H	34	36.0	36.0
H	H	L	33	34.3	
H	L	H	21	34.3	34.1
L	H	H	25	33.7	
L	L	H	18	33.0	
H	L	L	15	31.9	31.2
L	H	L	15	29.2	
L	L	L	32	28.1	28.1

Note: H stands for parents who scored above the median on that variable; L stands for parents who scored below the median.